

Building Blocks for Father Involvement: First Thoughts on Getting Fathers Involved in Head Start

(links for viewing and download at end of transcript)

Ernesto Alas: You ready? Okay, let's go. Yeah, you did it! When I was a kid about three years old my parents divorced so, you know, we have to separate so they said tell me which...which one you want to go. So I chose to be with my mother. [To Child] This is Grandma, when she was young, she was like a father and mother and I grow up around her, but it feel like a little spot missing, part of my life because my dad was not with me.

And that hurt me a lot and that's why I always say one day when I grow up I want to be married and I want to have my kids and I want to make sure my family will be together and I want to be the best, the best and never happen with me you know, like my father was before. [Child: I win!] [To child: You win!]

Well, my faith is really important because when you are praying, when you have communication with God its helped me a lot, how to talk to my kids, how to give to my kids, how to learn everything about my kids, how to learn everything about my kids so I think the faith for me is very, very important. I will have to learn from the kids. I heard a story from somebody at my work, his father was working all the time, but the little kid was was eight years old. He liked to spend more time with his father and one day he asked his father how much money you make per hour?

Why you and he he say why you want to know? Well because I just want to know. And he don't tell him. So the next day he his father was thinking about I don't know why he want to know how much money I make. So finally he he told him, "Okay I make about \$25.00 per hour." So he tried to save \$25.00. When he got the \$25.00 in quarters, pennies, dollar bills and everything, he make a little plastic bag, put in there and then say "Father, I got \$25.00, can you spend one hour with me?"

And his father starts crying so from that day his father give him more time. For me it was very, you know, wow, it's it's very touching for me, you know, I say wow and it's very it's very nice for me for telling this kind of thing to the parents who maybe they don't they don't do nothing with their kids so this kind of is so maybe they can change it to...

Woman 1: When you say "Daddy I'm cold.", Daddy comes and gives you a nice hug. Ernesto Alas: Head Start, that's helped me a lot. I got many ideas but I don't know if it can work in my community. I think is going to probably send a letter or call a person up, a parent to say hey do you like to come into the meeting, the parents meeting? They oh, maybe some time they don't have transportation or maybe they just don't want to go. So I really would like to do something to get more parents there.

I been learning a lot to be a better father, to be in more communication with my kids, to be more involved in my kids activities because I love my kids and I have to do the best for them.

Woman 1: I love my daddy and my daddy loves me. Narrator: The first thing you will notice about Building Block 2 is how it encourages you to ask some hard questions about why we sometimes overlook dads and it takes a long hard look at what a real Head Start father is like.

Child 1: My dad is big and strong, he got strong muscles. Child 2: My dad plays games with me. Child 3: I love my daddy. Woman 2: Very good Joseph, you're doing a wonderful job, you are too Janey.

Narrator: Unfortunately, getting children prepared for life-long learning is usually seen as mother's work, dads are too often seen as optional in this part of their children's lives. Nothing could be further from the truth. We know from solid research that children who grow up with an active father in their lives are more likely to do well in school and more likely to finish their education as well as enjoy better physical and emotional health.

Windy Hill: I think there are a number of reasons why sometimes we overlook dads. Head Start classroom -- pretty much most of our staff -- are women. Sometimes they're more comfortable with moms than dads. Sometimes they've had experiences that weren't necessarily positive with their own dads and then other times I think that they don't

recognize the important and unique role that fathers have in the lives of their children and in ensuring their school readiness and their success in life.

Woman 3: But we think it's very important that you have a father who is involved with your family. Narrator: From the moment you meet a new Head Start family, you need to make Dad a big part of your Head Start Program.

Ivette Cintron: The way that we have worked toward that is number one from the beginning, they're in the application process. If it's Mom sitting there, Mom is gonna get the message that we really believe and are supportive of the fact that males play a major influence in their child's life - that Dads need to play a major influence.

Narrator: Head Start family goals include recognizing that both mothers and fathers play an essential role in the healthy development of children, working to help both mothers and fathers understand and appreciate the vital and unique roles they play in their child's healthy development, and appreciating and learning about both parents as fully as possible regardless of whether the parents live in the same home.

Robert Goslin: They may have visitation, they have custody issues. There's so many issues that fathers can face and so what I find in my work is if I can work with dads through some of these issues and work with them, then they have a better opportunity to interact with their child.

Narrator: There are many stereotypes about unwed non-custodial fathers - ½ "Deadbeat Dad" is a term that comes to mind -- men who make babies then disappear. In truth, many non-custodial dads are men who want to be involved in their children's lives.

Michael Lamb: I think the research, much of which has been done only in the last few years, has shown that the stereotype of the uninvolved, disinterested low-income father is...is really misleading. That contrary to that stereotype, the...the research shows us that these fathers have the same motivation and are as committed to doing whatever they can to promote their children's welfare.

Narrator: Take the quiz in the second Building Block manual. Take some time to think about the dads in your program and take a long hard look at how dads are treated each time they walk in the door. Then, get ready to knock down some walls.

Denota Watson: We had one instance where a principal at a particular school you know resisted the fathers coming in and said "Oh the father can't come in, men can't come in and get involved, they have to go and get a background check to make sure that..."

Narrator: Fear that increased male involvement in the program might challenge the safety of children is one of the barriers you may have to overcome. Other challenges include concern that money to run a fatherhood program will drain funding away from other needed areas, fear of conflict between moms and dads who don't live together as they participate in the programs, and staff that don't understand how fatherhood work cooperates with other program priorities.

Ivette Clinton: And so we could consider those things and kind of think of where we want to go next season -- what type of improvements we want to see, kind of what are the partnerships that we want to form...

Narrator: Other barriers come from how your program interacts with the dads themselves. Does the physical environment of your program make fathers feel welcome? For instance, are there posters on the wall and other signs that focus on dads' participation? Do dads know they can make a difference? Does your program offer opportunities for fathers to be involved during the time of day they can be involved?

Robert Goslin: You have to get their interest; you have to get fathers to buy into the program, to buy into the activities. We need to make our programs father-friendly. We have to make them open, let fathers know they're welcome.

Savoui Graham: The message we want to send is that fathers are critical to the wellbeing of their children. When they

are positively involved then everyone wins i.e. ½- the child wins, the mother, the fathers win i.e. ½- and we believe that that's going to help improve the condition of our society.

Narrator: Once you recognize the barriers to father involvement that might exist within your own program, or within the dads themselves, you can position yourself for greater success including fathers in your children's lives. A child with a loving, involved mother and father is a child that has an incredible Head Start in life.

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